The Fountainhead

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This morning I am going to discuss with you a novel entitled "The Fountainhead" by Ayn Rand. This is a very difficult book to handle in a sermon, for there are so many themes involved. Even very close attention to this sermon will be no substitute for direct contact with the book, but should be helpful in giving an appreciation of these themes.

It is interesting to me to think that there probably isn't one person in the congregation who has read this to ten who read the book I touched on last week. That, too, is a commentary which receives illustration in the story I am about to unfold. It is an attribute of our Society and an aspect of Humanity that is not commendable.

"The Fountainhead" is concerned with a number of characters. The chief struggle is centered around the attempt of a young architect back in the Twenties and the Thirties to bring into being his vision of what buildings should be. He had a fresh vision, and his struggle to introduce a new concept into the field of American architecture is the area and atmosphere of the story.

Two young men are at the center of the book. First of all, there is a chap named Peter Keating. Peter wanted to be a painter, but his mother knew that architecture was much more dignified, that people made more money at it, and were much better received in social circles, so Peter became an architect.

The story opens with Graduation Day in a school of architecture in New England, and Peter is the top student in the Graduating class. The faculty is proud of him, and he moves only in the "select" circle of the socially acceptable in spite of the fact that his mother is forced to take in

boarders. Peter has been offered the opportunity of four years of study in Paris at a Fine Arts School. He has also been offered the choice job of the year in a leading architect's firm in New York. He is the darling of the school.

Alongside of him is Howard Roark. Roark doesn't have any family, and he rooms at Peter's place. Roark doesn't have any friends either. He is the kind of person that doesn't hate anyone, but doesn't seem to love anyone. He doesn't go around making friends, but he doesn't make enemies, except insofar as the students and faculty just didn't like him. There is something about him that repels them, that makes them want to see him beaten.

Roark's is a peculiarly independent spirit. At the same time that Peter Keating is graduating with the highest honors, Roark, in his junior year, has been expelled from the Stanton School of Architecture. He has been expelled because of disobedience and insubordination. When asked to do a Renaissance villa, the Dean says he hands him something that looks like blocks of glass piled on top of each other. When asked to do a Tudor mansion, he produces something of the same sort. He is a brilliant student in the engineering aspects of his career, wonderfully good at mathematics, and leads the class in most of those things, but he would never do what was expected of him. He had his own idea of the way buildings should be built, and he had to build them that way. But when he refused to come to terms, to meet the demands of the school authorities, to fit into the mould that had been long established, the Dean expelled him.

All the way through school, Roark, while he didn't move with Keating and his crowd, was the one to whom Keating went for help on his problems. More than one of Peter's plans came from Roark. Now they begin their careers together, Peter, on the advice of Roark, taking the job in New York instead of going to Paris to study.

Peter takes the job. In a very few days, he is the "Crown Prince" of this tremendous, popular establishment. It isn't

long before he has taken the place of one of the designers. He did it by doing his work for him. When the designer wanted to get off early, Keating would stay and do his work for him, and then make it known abroad. Soon the boss discovered that he could get along with just one of the two, and of course Keating was the one they chose.

In a few years he managed to become chief designer of the firm. He had become the favorite of Francone, the man who owned the firm. He was invited out to all the social parties. He was recognized as an up-and-coming, brilliant young architect. He got the place of the leading designer by taking a contract from the firm and steering it his individual way, and then encouraging him to go into business for himself. When he left, Keating was the one who naturally rose to the vacant position.

Soon he became a partner of the firm. He did that by discovering a little bit of "finagling" on the part of the very elderly partner who merely contributed the money to the firm. Peter confronted him with this evidence, and threatened to have him expelled from the Architects' Association unless he resigned from the firm. When this feeble old man dropped dead from the shock, the world discovered that he had willed all his money to Keating in a burst of sentimentalism some months previous to this incident. So Keating had arrived at the top.

Roark, in the meanwhile, had been working in a broken-down architect's office at $15.00 a week. The architect, named Cameron, had known a brief period of great success, but then Society had turned thumbs down on his radically new buildings, and his prestige had gone down and down. All acknowledged him as a superb craftsman and an artist, but nobody would give him any business. Roark had seen this man's buildings, and knew that he was the only man who had anything to offer him, the only real architect in the country, and so he went to work for him. Cameron had now become a dissolute drunk, unable to take any longer the

rebuffs of the world and to watch the enthronement of mediocrity.

Howard Roark sought him out, lived with him and worked with him. Cameron told Roark early, "Get out of here while you can. If you stay any longer, I will keep you, but leave while you are free to leave. I don't want to be responsible for the things the world will do to you if you try to carry out this ideal of yours." But Roark stayed.

Finally, Cameron had to retire from business, and Roark had to go to work in the various architects' offices, doing menial tasks when he was now equipped to build great buildings. He even went to work for Keating. He went to work for this fellow who didn't have one-tenth of his ability and capacity. And he was dismissed from this job because he wouldn't sell his integrity. Roark wandered around looking for other jobs, and finally found one. Then, through a rare, fortunate streak, and yet like most bits of luck, because of the intrinsic ability of this man, he got a job and opened his office — Howard Roark, Architect. Then a few buildings came his way, the first commission from an independent newspaper writer, the next one from a garageman who had seen the building, and somehow or other he liked it, and commissioned Roark to do a job for them. Then one of those businessmen who make their money in a retail store in the center of the city, who made it by himself, and who owed nothing to anyone, wanted a new building, and he saw Roark's building, and he said. "That's what I want." He was independent enough to get it. But after that, his building failed because it was in an outgrown section, and so Roark had just a successful garage to his credit, and a house that everyone called a booby trap.

Roark was rejected and finally had to go to work in a quarry to keep going, but through another one of those rare things, a man had seen one of these buildings — this industrial store — and had said, "He is the man I want for my building," located him away up in Vermont, and down

Roark came. Now his career began to grow, and buildings trickled into him, and he was increasing in stature

And in this, there is a girl, a third character we meet, and she is Dominic, and you must remember her. Dominic falls in love with Roark. She is the daughter of Francone, the boss of this first architect, Keating, but that is incidental. Dominic is in love with Roark. She is that independent kind of person who knows immediately she sees him what he is doing, and when she sees his buildings, she knows what he is after, and it strikes the chord in her. She can have no dealings with the ordinary commonplace type of thing that is done, but she makes it her business to take away from Roark, even while she is loving him, every contract she possibly can, and gives to Keating, whom she despises, every contract she can; and finally, she marries Roark? No, she marries Keating.

Now comes the fourth character, a man named Ellsworth Toohey. Toohey is a newspaper writer and writes a column on architecture, and he deals with the movements of the day. He is known abroad in the land as a great altruist, as an unselfish man. He is left one hundred thousand dollars by an admirer, and he turns it over to the school in which he works. He speaks for labor movements, and he is the champion of all the Common Man. Every time the Common Man is threatened, he comes to his rescue. He writes for these people, and yet he is this distinguished scholar.

Toohey, like Dominic — and you take the two of them together — sets out to build up Keating and to destroy Roark. He gives Keating publicity. He counts him as one of the great architects of the day, and just lavishes contracts on him because he is a man of influence, and his judgment in architecture is respected. All the time he is ignoring Roark; never gives the slightest line to him; never mentions him once in conversation. He is trying to freeze him out. Then as Roark's buildings get more and more numerous — not multiple, but just one after another of those people trickle by and see them, and out of ten thousand who see them, one

man says: "That is something I want," and when he comes to build, seeks Roark out — Toohey finally decides that Roark has come far enough so that he will have to be beaten. He will have to be handled and destroyed, and so he maneuvers a contract for him to build a temple, a temple which a fat little man wanted to erect to atone for the sins he had committed in achieving his fortunes. Toohey persuaded this disgusting person to give Roark the contract, and then to go away for a year, and not to come back until the building was built. Of course he knew that anything Roark would put up would not be liked by this man. You see, Toohey knew what he was doing. And when the man came back, it was as predicted, and so he sued Roark for the necessary cost to remodel the building, and he won his lawsuit, and Roark was dragged through the courts as a man who had no religion, as a person who defiled the name of religion because the buildings he had erected had nothing to do with the temples and the shrines that this little business man had seen in his journeys through the Holy Land and the Asiatic countries. Religion, of course, had to be just what he had seen, and couldn't be anything new and no expression of spirit. He wanted an Asiatic replica and Roark had given him an expression of his spirit and the way in which he saw religion as necessary for his day. So Roark was that much further on the road to ruin because of Toohey.

Now, we come near the end of the book. There is a great housing project being put on by Washington, and it has to be a low rental basis and none of these workers in Renaissance, Classic and Tudor periods know how to do it. Keating wants the job because by now he has become a broken person. He has been deserted by Toohey, and he wants the job for his self-respect. So, he goes to Roark. He goes again as he has been doing all the way through his career. His first building, his first important one, and the great prize he had won, all of them had been done by Roark as his school work had been done, and then Peter had copied them and had won the award. Now he went to Roark and asked him if

he would design this new housing establishment, and Roark took it on, on the condition that Peter Keating would put his name to it and would have all the glory and prestige and the money, but that he, Keating would see to it that the buildings were erected exactly as Roark had designed them. All he wanted was the opportunity to build them; to do what was in him. Who got the money and the honor was a matter of indifference to him. Keating agreed, but when Roark came back from a trip, he found that the contract he had entered into with Keating, of course unknown to anyone else, and been deserted, and the buildings changed. So Roark took dynamite and blew up this low price housing arrangement — blew it up with dynamite, and — again he was in court. Then comes the trial, and that is near the end of the book and Roark wins.

Now we go back just a little bit, and I want the fifth character to come in. He is Gale Wynant, and he is a great newspaper owner of New York tabloids and tabloids in every city. He has come up through Hell's Kitchen in New York, and he has fought his way with knives and struggles in the street. He came into his power by determination and by the artful use of this really dynamic, powerful, creative spirit that he had; and he built himself up into a position of power by utilizing his knowledge of people and his utter contempt for them.

Now we will go back and we will relate this Wynant to Dominic. Dominic despised Keating and she married him. Then she picked out this Wynant through the machinations of Toohey again, and she married him because he was the last person in the world she wanted to be married to. You see she was mortifying her spirit, trying to beat down something in herself; and Keating had actually let her go to Wynant for the sake of a great contract. So, you see, Keating still is selling himself for the opportunity of being known as the builder.

Wynant, however, turns out to be not the kind of person that Roark and Dominic think he is. He is the one person

Roark comes closest to hating, because he had had the hatred passed on to him by his teacher, Cameron, and Wynant had been pointed out as the symbol of all that was meanest and cheapest and most shameful in Mankind, as the symbol of that which would destroy Roark as it had destroyed Cameron, and as it had destroyed every individualist who had ever appeared. But Wynant, in his own life, was not that kind of person. He was a man who had the spirit of Roark and Dominic, and they knew it.

Wynant didn't know, however, that Roark and Dominic had been lovers and known each other intimately, but he then began to support Roark. It had been his paper that had chiefly convicted Roark on that first trial of the temple, but now, in this second trial over the dynamiting of the housing project, it is Wynant that comes out and reverses his whole position to support Roark. Roark hasn't built his own private house, he hasn't built his buildings for him, but the trend is too late, and Wynant finds that as his support for Roark grows in this trial, his circulation drops, and when it comes to a show-down with his board of directors, he has got to sell out or quit his campaign, he quits the campaign, and he goes in with his board again, so that he is finally defeated in his attempt to rise to the heroic. Dominic then leaves him, and she and Roark come together as the victors in this titanic struggle.

Now I want you to go back with me and analyze very briefly these characters, and the analysis is the most important thing, but for those of you who haven't read the book, the analysis would mean nothing without the interrelation with the story and the outcome.

Just look for a minute at Peter Keating. Keating is the "second-hander," as he is called in the book. He lives on other people's work. He has always borrowed from Roark. He has always gone to Roark for help, but Keating has been the successful one. He had nothing, himself, to contribute. He wanted to do the things that other people wanted him to

do, and so he didn't want to be great. He wanted to be considered great. He didn't want to build. He wanted to be thought of as a builder. He didn't want to hold any ideas. He wanted other people to think he held ideas. You see, he lived in people. They were his standard. They were his motivation. They were his thinking and his virtue and his ideal. Anything they wanted, he would give them. His attempt was always to make sure that he knew what they wanted, and then he had no compunction. People like that, the story is pointing out, are always borrowing from other people. They borrow from the few outstanding men who are creators, and then they come down and merge themselves in the mass of the people, and they do not live in themselves. They live in other people. Their life is all set there.

Roark, on the other hand, didn't live in anyone. You see, he is the creator. Now Peter didn't know what he was doing. He just wanted pride. He wanted reputation. He wanted esteem. He wanted financial return. He wanted the glow of company, but he was always naive, and I might say, very stupid about it. He never once analyzed it. Roark is the same character the other way. Roark never asked any man what he wanted. Roark never asked any man what he himself should do. Roark didn't care what other people thought. He really didn't care what they wanted. His life was in himself. He knew what he wanted. He knew what he had to do, and he was going to do it. If the world didn't want it, he couldn't help that. He would still do what he could. And here is one of the most important lines in the book. No matter how the world treated him; no matter how these meriocrities stepped on him and walked over him; no matter how the people shamed him and talked about him, he said, "It only hurt down to a certain point."

There is my sermon, I think. It only hurt down to a certain point, and it couldn't go any further. Of course he wanted to build, and when they wouldn't let him, it hurt, but he didn't live in people's reputation, in people's eyes. He

didn't live on people's approval. He lived on his adherence to the highest and the best that was in him, and when you live that way, no one else can touch you. No one else can vitally touch you. That is religion. There are a lot of people in the world today who should learn that, who must learn it.

Roark, you see, stands for the creator. He didn't think about it. He wasn't aware of what he was. He just had this burning passion there, and so on his side of the creator, he is exactly the same type as Keating on his side of the second-hander. They are both unconscious and naive. Of course, Roark is the larger character, but he is still the same type, naive, independent, with absolutely no regard for what other people thought or wanted. If they wanted a house, and he didn't want to build that kind of a house, he didn't build it. When he was at his lowest ebb, there was a contract to build a bank, and he designed it. If he lost this he had to go out of business. The Board called him in finally, and they said: "Now this is a little harsh, and people aren't used to it. Would you soften it a little bit? We have had another architect put a few decorations on it in order to make it acceptable to people. It will not alter your basic design any, and the contract is yours." And he said, "No." And he walked away, because a building, like a man, must have integrity, and integrity is a faithfulness to an idea.

Here is Dominic. Dominic has the feeling that the people in the world are not worth working for. She has this vision that Roark has, but she doesn't have it in his depth and magnificence. She feels that people are cheap and mean, and that they do not want excellence, that they only want three cent tabloids, and any kind of building people put up with decorations. They do not want to know the truth. They want to have it soft and flowery. They want to be comfortable. They want to sink themselves in the mass, and she hated them; and she set out to destroy Roark because she loved him. She said that the kind of buildings he built should never be allowed to be seen by people. That Christ-

mas sermon, you remember it? "He came too soon, this Christ, a hundred thousand years too soon." Well, Roark was a man such as men shouldn't see. They weren't large enough, and rather than have him put up a building to be defiled by the mass of the people, and scorned by them, she would not let that building go up. So she was protecting the honorable and the noble within her. But she didn't want to be right. As she fought him, she hoped that she would be beaten, and in the end she was. She came back to Roark, and here is the theme again, only when she had so humiliated herself as to reach a point of understanding that the important thing in life is that ideal within you, and that no one can touch you when you have that. From then on she was unafraid of what the world would do to her or to the man she loved or to the things for which they stood. They now lived for something beyond men.

Here is Toohey. He is trying to build up Keating and to destroy Roark because he agrees with Dominic, with this exception, that he is the schemer. He knows what people are made of, and he has no illusions. He doesn't want to be proven wrong, and he knows he will not be proven wrong. So he builds up people like Keating, because he thinks they are good? No, because he knows that they are not, and he knows that if you build up the mediocre and the common and the cheap, then you can control people, and he wanted power. He wanted nothing for himself. He just wanted to be able to run things, and he knew he could run people because their tastes were so low and because he could engineer it. There was no room in his scheme for an independent person like Roark, so he tried to destroy him. There was no place in his scheme for an independent woman like Dominic, so he tried to destroy her, and the same with Wynant.

There is the malevolent symbol of all that is bad in the world seeking to control that bad, deliberately exalting it. When he got tired of Keating, he would take some other mediocrity and he would exalt him. He would tell the people

that this man who wrote this play was a genius and that his play was good. If you didn't see the good in it, that meant that you were not far enough along. So people thought they had to like it, and they liked it. Toohey was going on to achieve this power.

Now there are people like that. You apply these things. I have been living in this book for weeks now, and everything I think and see seems to have a reflection in the symbolism of this book, and I hope you will find it fruitful for you.

There is this one other character, Wynant. He is a little different from any of the others. He is like Roark in that he has that kind of power and spirit. He is like Toohey insofar as he has utilized his knowledge of people to gain power, and his power is the power of controlling lives; and all he has got out of it is, as he says in a marvelous speech, silk shirts and cars, a penthouse and a yacht, and in exchange for that, he has given the world his soul. He didn't believe in this kind of thing. He didn't want it, but he had come up through Hell's Kitchen, and they booted him around, and they told him: "Get out. You don't run things here," and he decided someday he would run things, and because he had the same kind of power Roark had, he got to the position where he did run things, except that he found that he had been catering so long to the common tastes of people that he had sold himself too far. When there came the chance to redeem himself, to pull himself up out of the muck of the common mire into which he had sunk, he found that he couldn't quite make it. He had sold himself out too long, and he had to sink back into it. There are the characters representing life, and the whole sermon is preached again.

Now, I am going to summarize just very briefly the two major things that are dealt with in this book, as I see it, and in these characters. First of all, there is this theme of integrity. A man has to have an idea, and that means he has to think. And then he has got to be true to it. It is this

thing inside. In one place, Toohey says the hardest thing to get rid of is idealism because even in the most crude of us it grows. So, a man has to have integrity. He has got to have something in him that is pure, something that he believes. The Fountainhead, you see, is your allegiance to the highest and the best you can conceive for the human heart. When you find that in you, be true to it, and it doesn't matter a whit what the world has to say about it. It doesn't matter whether other people like it or not. It doesn't matter whether it is something new or not. If it is what you find to be the highest and the best, then bow down and worship it, for it is God within you, and you will find that other people can't touch you because you are living in a realm beyond.

You see what these other men had done? They had sold out that thing within them. Keating wanted to be a painter, and he sold it out for success and architecture. This man Toohey had seen it there, and deliberately walked around it, and do you know any worse sin than a recognition of what is true and best, and then a deliberate rejection of it? If there is an unpardonable sin, that is it, and Toohey committed it. Wynant had seen this thing, and he had tried it, worshipped it in himself while selling out to the world, and he couldn't do it, and he lost his soul. What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose this soul that is in him. Wynant, in one of the most wonderful passages in the book, says: "I am the real selfless person." He said: "I don't have a self any more. I have sold my soul for my shirts and my car and my yacht. I don't belong to me. I belong to anybody who can buy a three cent paper. Why, I am the real martyr. No monk in his shrine has ever sold out, given up as much as I have, because they give up the world and keep their soul. I have given up my soul."

This woman begins to argue that the thing that is needed in this world is more selfishness in the sense of people's maintaining and guarding the self that they have, and that nothing you can pay is too much for that. Do you remember my discussing, some months ago, the idea that you can't ever

sacrifice the lesser to the greater? You only sacrifice when you sell out the greater for the lesser, and that is what these men were doing, and they had lost the soul that was in them. They had given it to the world, and now they had nothing. We have got to learn to treasure the God that is within us. Be true to the royal in yourself.

The other great theme is man's attitude to Humanity. How are you going to regard people? I have been touching on this lately, even before I ran into this book, and it is a problem. You look at people, and you say: "This is what they like. This is the sort of thing they like. This is what they are." And you begin to feel you ought to cater to that lowest, that certainly there is no chance of raising up something in front of them that is superior to that. You oughtn't to be casting your pearls before swine, and so you begin to move with the crowd. You lose your respect for Humanity.

That is what Toohey had done. That is what Wynant had done. Keating was too ignorant, but that is what he was doing. Most of us are like Keating, you see, unconscious about it, we go on living in other people and despising them in ourselves because of it, and there comes that awful boredom of spirit to so many people. A few are like Toohey who despise it to use it, and like Wynant and despise it to gain power. Very few of us are like Roark who just innocently go on being what we are, and a few more of us, but very few, are like Dominic, seeking and struggling with all our spirit against the tendency of this common mass to succor and know it. She struggles free finally after having paid heavy, and she emerges triumphant because now she has won out over the lowest common denominator.

The authoress of this book is making the great point that collectivism is coming, and that in there, we are all going to lose our souls because we are going to be serving people. She makes the mistake of thinking that the only way you can serve people is by giving them what they want, and so when we all begin to live for Society at large, we will become

nonentities with nothing to give, and the only hope is for more individualists to arise.

That is where she makes her mistake. You see, Jesus had an integrity of spirit, and He didn't sell out to the world; but His devotion was not merely to this idea in Himself. It was a devotion to the ideal in Himself in its scope of possibility of service to Man, and He didn't give the people what they wanted; He gave them what He felt was in them, and what they had to have. He won out on it, and we, too, can win out on it. We can have our respect and our integrity, but we don't need to be the isolationist Roark was, because we can conceive of the true altruism as consisting of that of Jesus, a devotion of the best in you, to other people, the best and noblest in you, to the best and noblest in other people; and if they don't want it, then you will go down fighting, but they will never reach through to break your spirit.

There is the secret for this new world. There is the secret for people who are suffering losses, and for people who are being battered. There is the only way in which this world will see its way through this coming blackness, because when you have got your life set in God, other people can't hurt you. Other people can't touch you. You are not afraid for what the world can do to you. You are not afraid if the things you stand for are destroyed. You are not afraid for the present. You are not afraid for what the future may bring. You are living with God, and no one can touch you, because your life is set on a higher plane, with a deeper foundation. Those who work in the Light have fellowship one with the other, and however rare that fellowship is, it is always there, at least between you and God.

Sermon delivered by Dr. Duncan E. Littlefair
Sunday, January 14, 1945